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ABSTRACT

Over a 5-week period 43 typical trainers in a nationwide corporation were observed to determine uses and abuses of training techniques. The adult educators who were observed were technically expert, but otherwise untrained. Factors that enhance or detract from training effectiveness were identified, specifically as regards organizing and developing presentations. Abuses of the factors were determined, and recommendations for improvement were made. The following factors/components of organizing and developing presentations were studied: objectives, sequencing, methods and techniques, timing, audiovisual materials, and mannerisms or trainers' behaviors. The technicians/trainers who participated in the observation agreed that a heightened awareness of the principles of adult education would help them plan, develop, and present better programs in the future. (YLB)

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TECHNíQUES

May, 1984

Adult Education As Training In Business And Industry

An area of adult education long ignored as such is that of training in business and industry. The training field has grown enormously in the past decade with current expenditures for training and development now running about $80-100 billion per year. American Telephone and Telegraph alone spends approximately $1.5 billion per year on training. There are approximately 700,000 full and part time adult educators in business and industry. Presumably this figure includes many of the past, present, and potential students who enroll in adult education degree programs.

Because of the lack of attention given to training as a specific domain within adult education, most people involved in conducting training find their way into these positions by virtue of technical expertise. Later, if ever, they may find their way into a degree program. They are selected to teach others because of their mastery of the subject or task at hand without regard to their knowledge or experience in training.

While some of the people who become trainers because of their expertise excel in the role, it is more often the case that these trainers suffer in their ability to deal with adults as learners. They are unaware of the assumptions and principles, drawn from the literature of adult education, that might contribute to their effectiveness.

Recently a systematic observation was made over a five week period of 45 typical trainers in a well known large nationwide corporation. These trainers possessed a high degree of technical expertise as well as long work experience with their company (over 10 years in every case). They were, however, totally unaware of any of the tenets of training and adult education. Some, by virtue of their own charisma, innate ability to relate to other adults, or ability to organize themselves and others, have been successful. Others have not.

The following represents uses and abuses of training techniques gleaned from the five weeks of observation of technically expert, but otherwise untrained, adult educators. The list offers valuable reminders of factors which enhance or detract from training effectiveness.

Organizing And Developing Presentations

Objectives

In many cases trainers began presentations in the absence of clearly defined objectives. At best there were only vague goals or purposes. Achievable, observable behavioral objectives, clearly transmitted to trainees in either written or spoken form are the foundation for any training session. Particular needs of trainees should be acknowledged in these objectives.

Sequencing

Little thought was given to how material might have been sequenced in order to obtain the best results in terms of learning. The most frequently used sequence by the subject trainers was that of (1) logical sequencing or presenting first what must be known to proceed. While this sequencing was appropriate, other forms might have been more effective. For example sequencing (2) from general to specific or why before how is the technique that was used with the next greatest frequency. It is particularly effective when the subject is new to the learners. (3) Interest sequencing or what most interests the learner, (4) skill sequencing or starting with what it takes to do the job, and (5) frequency sequencing or what will be done most often. The last three were not used in any presentation.

Methods And Techniques

Observations revealed a consistent reliance on the lecture as the primary mode of instruction. There was a general failure to take advantage of other methods such as the problem solving, role play, the case study, demonstrations, or quizzes. Instructional methods and techniques should be tailored to the desired outcome. The lecture will provide information, but if a higher level of learning is desired, i.e. problem solving or making application, or if one desires to teach motor skills, other techniques must be used. Total lecture is a passive form of teaching and represents a failure to take advantage of the individual experience among the learners. All things equal, active learning produces longer lasting benefits than passive learning. Allowing trainees to participate in their own learning experience through discussion or other interaction was often perceived as a loss of control by trainers. Many teachable moments were missed when trainers charged on with additional lecture material rather than tending to the needs of the adult learners through participative instruction.

Additional infractions of the lecture method included failure to repeat or emphasize main points, and failure to break up the information with appropriate audiovisuals or question and answer periods.

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Timing

Trainers demonstrated an inability to gauge how much material could be taught successfully within a given time frame. This confusion may have stemmed from the way in which the schedule was typically planned. Most often the schedule for the observed training was drawn up as a function of how much time was available for trainees to be away from their job site. The second consideration was how much material there was to be covered. The most important factor was neglected – how much time was needed in order for learning to take place. One reason why timing proved difficult for these trainers was their failure to develop objectives.

Appropriate timing is directly related to clearly defined objectives.

Audiovisual Materials

Trainers in the observed group fell into the trap of dependence on one form or another of visual aids. Among these trainers this dependency was on the use of the overhead projector and transparencies. While this form of visual can be very effective as well as inexpensive and convenient, it can be over done if used as the sole technique. Other problems with this medium are that transparencies can be cluttered, difficult to read or even see, and therefore difficult to follow. There was also a tendency among the subjects to use professionally prepared transparencies when available, although a handmade prepared version might better have suited the needs of the learner. Trainees seemed to appreciate the use of color coding, when possible, with a simple message.

There is an abundance of audio and visual aids available and dependence on one kind can induce a near comatose state of boredom in trainees.

Timing is a factor when making decisions about types of aids to use. For example, an effective way to close down learning is to dim the lights and show a film or slides immediately after lunch.

Sexual, racial, and other stereotypes should be avoided throughout training sessions and audiovisuals are no exception. For example, it is inappropriate to use slides, pictures, or transparencies of scantily clad women or men, when the point being emphasized or demonstrated is unrelated. While this might momentarily increase interest, the interest will not be in the knowledge being imparted. There is the additional risk of offending participants.

Trainers need to organize carefully once a decision is made concerning which audiovisuals will be used. All equipment should be tested in advance and be ready for use before trainees arrive. Lighting and seating should be thought through. A frequent mistake observed with the use of the overhead projector was that trainers failed to have the transparencies arranged in order and positioned so that there was no need to block the projected image when changing from one transparency to another.

Effective use of audiovisuals included planning for smooth transitions between techniques. These trainers planned the lecture or guided the discussion to logically lead to the use of a particular audiovisual and vice versa.

Mannerisms or Trainers' Behavior

Even the best planned presentation can be ruined by inappropriate behavior from the trainer. During the five weeks of observation, video tapes were made of participant trainers in action in the classroom. Several tips were gathered from review of these tapes. It is distracting when trainers habitually pace, sway or jingle coins in pockets. Many trainers use the pointer to tap out familiar rhythms on desk tops and other furniture. In short, trainers often have distracting nervous mannerisms of which they are unaware.

Videotaping is an excellent means for self diagnosis. Trainers are often appalled at the number of times they utter "okay" and "uhhhh" during a brief videotaped session.

Another difficulty which showed up frequently was the lack of trainer-trainee eye contact. Trainers tended to talk to whatever visual they were using, usually the image projected on a screen. Eye contact can be a powerful attention-getter when employed by a trainer who is comfortable with moving around the classroom instead of being glued behind a speakers' stand.

The most effective presentations observed made use of tasteful humor appropriate to the situation, often directed by the trainers at themselves. In addition, these trainers changed the expression on their faces more often and varied the tone, volume, and speed of their voices for emphasis. During the observation period no single trainer did everything perfectly. Neither did any single trainer exhaust the list of errors. Yet, after viewing the replays on videotape useful generalizations were drawn from the collective presentations.

Conclusion

The technician/trainers who participated in this combination observation and workshop agreed that a heightened awareness of the principles of adult education would help them plan, develop, and present better programs in the future.

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